

T. McDougall

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Is Inerrancy  
A New Test of Orthodoxy?

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BY

THOS. McDOUGALL.



CINCINNATI:

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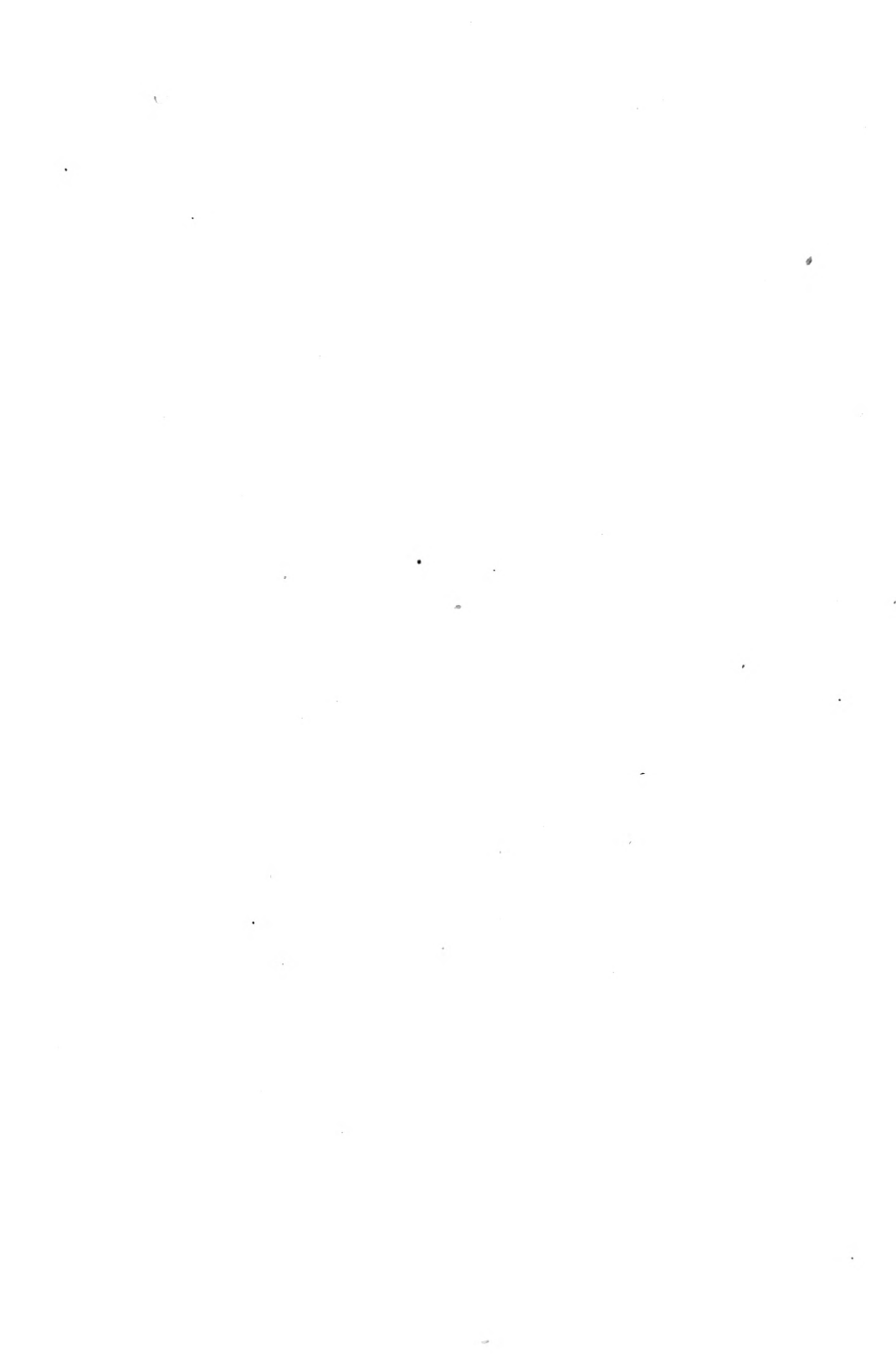
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## IS INERRANCY A NEW TEST OF ORTHODOXY?

A discussion of more or less intensity, and accompanied with much rhetoric and apparent feeling, has arisen in these days, on the above subject. Here are declarations on the subject which, being typical, state a certain position fairly :

The Rev. T. S. Hamlin, D.D., says :

“These principles are clear and true quite apart from this particular doctrine or opinion of inerrancy. *This I, for one, neither affirm nor deny. It is a theory wholly in the air.* No living man, no man that has lived for centuries, has seen the original autographs of the Holy Scriptures. We can neither prove nor disprove the theory. We are ignorant about this matter, and should be content to remain so.”

The Rev. Henry Van Dyke, D.D., says :

“I will have nothing to do with this theory of the inerrancy of the original autographs. I neither affirm nor deny it. Whether the original autographs were free from the difficulties which exist in the present text, or not, is one of those things which no man can find out. This theory may be true, or it may be purely imaginary. God knows ; I do not. I am perfectly contented with my ignorance.”

The portion of the ordination vow of each minister, elder, and deacon, in the Presbyterian Church, bearing on this subject, is as follows :

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
3. Do you approve of the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in these United States?

It is claimed with great confidence, and with an assumption of the right to judicially determine the question, and infallibly construe the constitution of our Church, that the declaration of the General Assembly of 1892, the essential part of which is as follows : “ Our Church holds that the inspired Word, as it came from God, is without error,” is the imposition of a new test of orthodoxy, an essential enlargement, limitation, or variation of the foregoing ordina-

tion vow, a vital addition to its terms, attempted to be imposed without authority, and which is denounced as follows :

The Rev. T. S. Hamlin, D.D., says :

“ Now, if the inerrancy deliverance stood upon the same footing, it would be a simple and harmless matter. But the resolution carefully exalts this opinion to the level of a doctrine. It asserts that ‘ our Church holds ’ it. It assumes that every minister assented to it at his ordination. It calls upon him, if he does not now believe it, to leave the Church. It embraces in this summons all ordained officers, elders, and deacons, as well as ministers. And, if they do not withdraw, it ‘ enjoins ’ the courts of the Church to ‘ speedily ’ discipline them and eject them. In other words, this deliverance, under the guise of an interpretation of the standards, sets up a totally new doctrine, which it declares the Church ‘ holds ’ and makes it a test of ministerial and official standing.

“ Now, I deliberately and solemnly pronounce this an act of the grossest usurpation, to resist which is the urgent duty of every Presbyterian that loves his Church, and cherishes her historical stand for liberty, both personal and ecclesiastical. The General Assembly is as much bound by the Constitution as is the humblest minister or member of the Church. It has no more authority to impose the opinion of a majority of its members upon us as a doctrine, than it has to declare that its views about lynching shall have all the force and weight of a Federal Statute, and to send a district attorney or a judge to prison because he fails to prosecute and convict accordingly.”

To one who, as an elder, has recently subscribed to this ordination vow, and who, before its subscription could say, as Hugh Miller said in his letter to Lord Brougham, June, 1839 : “ I never signed the Confession of her Faith, but I do more, *I believe it*,” this discussion on “ Inerrancy ” is perplexing and amazing.

Hugh Miller’s declaration—as the writer’s subscription—was to the Confession of Faith as it stands, “ *unrevised* ; ” this too in the exercise of the largest liberty worthy of the name—the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free ; implicit obedience to law and properly constituted authority ; the liberty that knows no other will but God’s ; the liberty that seeks only to know what God has said, and then

“ Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why.”

It is a liberty that has well defined convictions, is resolute in their defense, believes in settling differences according to law, accepts decisions thus made,



recognizes and discharges its obligations, and accords to all others the rights it claims for itself. This was the liberty of the school denominated by some as ultra-Calvinistic, Puritanical, sternly orthodox, narrow, unbending and inflexible, of whom the Rev. John Kerr, D.D., in his paper on "Scottish Nationality," says:

"Mr. Buekle, too, might have remembered his own remark, made we believe also by Rémusat, that wherever it has gone, in France, Switzerland, Holland, Britain and America, the Calvinistic faith has shown itself '*the unfailing friend of constitutional liberty.*' Historians have found it difficult to account for this, while they admit its truth. We believe it has arisen not merely from the form of government with which it has linked itself, '*one of ordered freedom,*' but from the fact that it has always carried its appeal past human authority in religion '*to the Word of God;*' that it has taught men to think for themselves as in His sight, and to seek that personal relation to Him which makes them free with the liberty of his children. It proclaims the grand divine equality, '*One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren,*' *out of which are built up again service and law and comely order in church and state, but now tempered by the action of reason and love.* It may be said that this is simply Christianity, and so it is; but there are forms of Christianity more or less pronounced, and, while we have great respect for the contribution that other forms have brought in their own way, we believe that the Puritans of England, old and new, and the Presbyterians of Scotland, have, with all their defects, *led the van in the cause of human freedom.*"

Is it too much to say that among these men were to be found the intellectual and spiritual giants of the race, men of great spiritual insight and fidelity to conviction, who believed in an inerrant God and his inerrant word, and in and by that faith wrought for liberty many of the blessings we now enjoy?

What a contrast they present to some of the "advanced" scholars of modern times, who, knowing no more of God and his revelation, can neither affirm nor deny that the word of the inerrant God as it came from him, was inerrant; this because they can not handle and cross-examine the original manuscripts, and subject them to the tests of their so-called "modern scholarship," and "advanced thought," and man's finite, sin-limited intellect.

Passing, for another occasion, the extraordinary character of these attacks on the action of the General Assembly, the supreme judicial and legislative body of our beloved Presbyterian Church, also the times, places, and manner of these attacks, as bearing on the question of respect for and obedience to prop-

erly constituted authority, by those who are subject to that authority, and who have obligated themselves to be teachers, by precept and example, of obedience to that authority ; and also the assumption of authority and superior wisdom manifested therein, and which is inconsistent with that humility which adorns genius and is essential to Christian peace and work, let us examine this latest issue in Presbyterian ecclesiastical circles—“*Inerrancy a new test of orthodoxy.*”

In so doing, let us remember that other and important pending issues, such as: “Have we a God-given, God-inspired Bible, so certain, so well defined that it is worthy of the faith of the race?” “Can a God-inspired book be false in its historical statements?” “Can the saving benefits of Christ’s redemption be enjoyed in any other way, and by any other persons, than as declared by the terms of the God-revealed scheme?”—are not to be side-tracked or lost sight of by the dust and clamor of this inerrancy controversy.

#### THE ASSERTED POSITIONS.

*a.* It is asserted with the greatest confidence, “that the condition or quality of what are called the original manuscripts of the Bible, as to being errant or inerrant, is, in the absence of the originals, incapable of proof, and is of no consequence as a matter of faith, or as affecting the God-inspired quality of the Bible as it now is.”

*b.* It is further asserted that the ordination vow does not embrace as a part of its terms, a subscription to the inerrancy of the Word of God, as it was given by Him to the race.

*c.* And further, that the terms of that vow are broad enough to include those who believe the originals were inerrant, as well as those who believe they were errant, and those who have no belief in the matter.

Let us examine these in their order.

#### I

IS THE QUALITY OR CONDITION OF THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BIBLE AS IT CAME FROM GOD, AS TO BEING ERRANT OR INERRANT, INCAPABLE OF PROOF IN THE ABSENCE OF THE ORIGINALS ; AND IS THIS OF NO CONSEQUENCE AS A MATTER OF FAITH, OR AS AFFECTING THE GOD-INSPIRED QUALITY OF THE BIBLE AS IT NOW IS ?

Let us pass, at this point, the claim that these originals having existed at some time, their condition must have been settled while thus in existence, and

that as a matter of history the fact of their existence must rest on the same evidence as their essential qualities, and which enable us to say they were immediately inspired by God.

Does the absence of the original manuscripts, as evidence, conclusively preclude proof of essential quality, while permitting conclusive proof of the existence of the originals, as a matter of fact? Can we separate the essential qualities of a thing from the fact of its existence, and in that absence conclusively prove the fact of its existence, and yet be incapable of proving its essential qualities? Can we prove the existence of Julius Cæsar, as a man, without being able to produce and examine the original; and yet affirm, because of that absence, our utter inability to prove the existence in him of the essential qualities of a man, and which enable us to say he was the man Julius Cæsar?

In an action in a civil court, for recovery on a lost promissory note, in the absence of the note, can the fact of the existence of the note be proved, without proving the terms essential to make it a note for which judgment may be rendered,—not the color, kind of paper, nor the manner of writing, but the existence of the essential terms, words and qualities that enable the court to say that it was a “note,” fixed in its terms, and definite in its obligations, and therefore in fact existed, and was *the* note it was claimed to be.

Can there be proof of and belief in the “*fact*” of the existence of the original manuscripts, as the Word immediately inspired by God, in the absence of the originals, without proof of and belief in the essential terms and qualities which make it the Word thus inspired by God? Is not confession of inability to prove that the original was inerrant, a confession of inability to prove there ever was an original?

Ingersoll says: “I neither affirm nor deny there is a God. I only say, I can not prove there is a God.” If we can neither affirm nor deny, by reason of the absence of the original manuscripts, their essential qualities and terms, does this not necessarily place us in the same position as to the fact of their ever having existed? Can we separate the thing from the essential qualities and terms, which make it possible to exist as the thing?

Is not the concession of possible error in what God gave us as his will, the destruction of the God-inspired quality of that revelation, and therefore the destruction of the Bible as it now is, as the Word of God?

Consider the conception of the character of God involved in the possibility

of error, or falsehood in his revelation to man. An infinite and omniscient God gives to finite man a revelation of his will, on which he commands man to act as the rule and conduct of his life. The truth of every statement in that revelation is known to God. The conclusive presumption is that every statement therein made is true in the absence of a declaration from God to the contrary. Knowing what, if any part, is errant or untrue in that revelation, if any statement, or part is errant or untrue, should God fail to declare and make known such errors or untruths, what must be his character?

What do men call the failure to make known the existence of error or falsehood in a document by one who knows of the existence of the error or falsehood, and who, as its author places the document in circulation as true, or delivers the same to a party who in receiving and relying on it, presumes the document to be true, being ignorant of the error or falsehood therein contained? Silence at times is criminal. There are times and circumstances when the permitted circulation of error as truth, is criminal.

It would seem as if the inability or unwillingness to affirm the inerrancy of the original manuscripts in their absence, can only arise from the conviction or fear of a possibility of discovering the existence of error or falsehood therein, on finding the originals, and on subjecting them to the cross-examination of so-called higher criticism.

What must be the character of one claiming to be God, who gives to man as his will a revelation which it is possible may be errant or false in parts, and if so, must be known to him, which errors or falsehoods he fails to specify or correct, and which he permits to be received, believed and acted on as inerrant, and on which he asks his finite creatures to risk their all for time and eternity?

Possible error or falsehood in God's Word, not designated or pointed out by Him, permitted to exist and pass current as truth, as inerrant! What kind of a conception of God's absolute verity, justice, and love, have such minds? Surely the inability to affirm the inerrancy of the original manuscripts, the Word of God as he gave it, in the absence of the originals, does not arise from the fear that on discovering the originals it might be found that the spelling, grammar, or punctuation were not what they ought to be to suit the fastidious tastes of so-called advanced modern scholarship.

To warrant the protests, the pathetic appeals, and solemn declarations that are being made by Drs. Hamlin, Van Dyke and others, on this subject of

the inerrancy of the original manuscripts, there must be the fear that if ever they are discovered, higher criticism might find therein false historical or other statements, which God had given to the race as a part of His Word, without disclosing their falsity. How the higher critics would blush for their reputations, if they affirmed inerrancy in the original manuscripts in their absence, and afterward they should be discovered, and on examination be found to contain error or falsehood. This might be hard on the higher critics, but what of God? How would his character be affected by such a discovery?

The reputation of the higher critics for definiteness of statement, exactness, and mathematical certainty of conclusions must be carefully preserved, at whatever cost, from the possibility and effect of such a discovery. They, therefore, neither deny nor affirm the inerrancy of the original manuscripts in their absence, even though their position involves the destruction of God's Word, making it impossible to have faith in any revelation, and above all, involves the destruction of the character of God Himself for inerrancy, absolute truthfulness, and fair dealing with man.

If the Bible as it now is—as men use these words—is inerrant, immediately inspired by God, then it has always been so. If errant in whole or in part, how can it be of God? How can it be the work of an inerrant God? No other God but an inerrant God, and no other revelation but an inerrant one is worthy the confidence of the race, on which the soul of man can rest its eternal destiny in safety.

In the absence of the original, in order to now believe in the Bible as inspired by God in any sense, is it not necessary to prove that God gave us this Word, and that it was immediately inspired by Him?

The quality of inspiration, of inerrancy of the Word must be proven as a "*fact*," in order to prove that it did in fact come from God—that we have any Word of God at all. How can we prove any word or message ever came from God, either in the absence or presence of the so-called original, without proof of the quality of its being God-inspired, inerrant?

What makes the Bible in any sense, in any part, the Word of God?

How is the fact of inspiration—inerrancy in any part or statement—proven now, in the absence of the so-called originals?

Why does not the same evidence, the same reasoning, apply to the Word as it came from God to prove its inspiration, and that it did in fact come from Him, as applies to the Word as it now is?

“ INERRANCY AS TO ESSENTIALS, ERRANCY AS TO NON-ESSENTIALS.”

To break the force of this position, a very curious distinction is sought to be made, between inerrancy as to that which is called essential to faith and practice, and what is called “merely human setting,” or non-essential. What or who authorizes this distinction, we fail to understand. It is assumed, evolved from the wish of those who make it. The Bible does not make it. God has not made, revealed nor authorized any such distinction. He has not drawn the line, nor catalogued what are claimed to be inerrant essentials, and errant non-essentials.

If such a distinction is warranted, which we deny, how can the fact be proved, in their absence, that the originals had the quality of being God-inspired, or inerrant, as to what is claimed to be essential to faith and practice, and yet there be an utter inability to prove by the same evidence the quality of that which is claimed to be non-essential, what is claimed to be merely historical, with the rhetorical pyrotechnics of “human setting,” if any person can define or tell what that is?

It being conceded, as it must be, if it is in any sense the inspired Word of God, that the absence of the original manuscripts does not preclude conclusive proof of, nor belief in the fact of their existence, nor of their God-inspired quality as to what are claimed to be matters essential to faith and practice; how is it possible on the same evidence to preclude proof of, and believe in the God-inspired quality as to matters historical, and those alleged to be non-essential, when applied to a book, a unit, a revelation from God, and which nowhere asserts or intimates that any such distinction exists, between matters claimed to be essential to faith and practice, and those of so-called history or human setting? How can we take the unit, the book, the thing, the fixed quantity, in the absence of its original, and prove and believe, in that absence, the fact of its existence, and that in matters essential to faith and practice, whatever these may be, the original had the quality of being God-inspired, “inerrant,” and yet assert our inability to prove the quality of inerrancy as to the other parts of the unit, or book?

“ *The Ordination Vow and the Admissions.*”

What must be the condition of one who has taken the ordination vow and admits the following :

*a.* God is, and is a spirit infinite, eternal and unchangeable, inerrant, never did and never could make a mistake, no other God being worthy of the faith and worship of the race.

*b.* This infinite God, a spirit, gave to finite man his creature, a revelation of his will, a compilation, a unit, a fixed quantity, as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, without which man could not know any thing, by reason, science or otherwise, as to his will.

*c.* The original manuscripts of this revelation, book, or compilation, though now lost, we can demonstrate, by existing evidence, to have once existed, and by the same evidence can demonstrate that they possessed the quality of being God-inspired and inerrant as to all matters therein contained which we claim are essential to faith and practice.

*d.* Notwithstanding the foregoing, we can not prove, on the same evidence as demonstrates the fact of existence and their inerrant quality as to what we claim to be essential to faith and practice, the inerrant quality of such matters in said revelation as we claim are non-essentials, purely historical, and belong to that indefinable, elastic quantity, "the human setting," although the revelation makes no such distinction or classification as to essentials and non-essentials.

In other words, we admit a revelation came from God, was God-inspired, that it once existed, and that every thing God gives as his work is inerrant; but in the absence of the original of this God-inspired revelation, while admitting we can prove the fact of its existence, and on proper evidence demonstrate that the original possessed the quality of inerrancy as to all matters which we claim are essential to faith and practice, we can neither affirm nor deny, can not prove on the same evidence, that what are called by us matters of history, non-essentials, are either errant or inerrant? Prove the fact of existence and quality of inerrancy as to essentials to faith and practice, but can not prove the quality of its non-essentials, its historical statements on the same evidence, in the absence of the original. Whither?

By what rule of evidence, or by what process of reasoning, intelligible to a man of sound mind, can a believer in a God-inspired record, which nowhere separates or classifies its statements into what are called the essentials of faith and practice, and the non-essentials of what are called history or "human setting," justify his faith in the existence of such a record in the absence of the

original, having the essential quality of inspiration or inerrancy as to one part, and deny his ability to prove the inspiration or inerrancy of the other part?

*“ The Result of the Concession, ”*

As we have said, is not the concession of possible error in what God gave us as His Word, the destruction of the God-inspired quality of that Word, and therefore the destruction of the Bible as it now is, as the Word of God? Is not the confession of inability to prove the inerrancy of the original manuscripts because of their absence, the confession of an inability to prove the fact that they ever existed,—inerrancy being the essential quality of the original manuscripts to warrant the proof of and the belief in the fact that they came from God and ever existed as immediately inspired by God?

Who can certainly and infallibly draw the line between what is called inerrant and what is called errant; what is essential to faith and practice, and what is not essential; what is God-given and what is man-made, in the absence of a revelation from God on the subject? Where is the warrant for such a distinction?

God has made no such distinction, no such classification; he has not revealed to any man what is claimed to be his inerrant work in His Word, and what in that Word is claimed to be the errant work of man. He has not said there is in it any of man's errant work. And what man dares alter, change, revise or attempt to improve upon this God-inspired record, and assert that any part of it, even so-called human setting is man's errant work?

What kind of faith will be the product of doctrines such as the following, touching the Bible: “ Thus saith the Lord, ” in certain parts, and “ Thus saith errant man, ” in other parts—which is which, to be determined by the whim, passion, interest, or so-called advanced scholarship of man's sin-limited, finite intellect? Will not the product of such doctrines be a nerveless, boneless, sinewless faith, driven about by every wind of doctrine, without stability?

The air is filled with the pyrotechnics of liberty, the gush of charity, and the clamor of “ peace and work. ” Do not assert any thing; do not deny any thing, lest hurt is given to some one's feelings, and division and dissension is caused. Do not cherish or express convictions, for they are inconvenient and troublesome things to have and maintain; banish theories, only let peace and plenty of it prevail, and give men a chance to work. This is the new standard; the latest rallying cry of the fearfals.



Only peacefully permit the deadly poison to work so that faith in God's Word be undermined, honey-combed by the sappers and miners of a thinly veneered rationalism and agnosticism! Only permit them to carry on their destructive business without hindrance, and leave us without a faith or a Bible, God-inspired, on which the soul of man can safely rest its eternal destiny!

Why not have convictions and express them? Why not say in what we believe, whether in an errant or in an inerrant Bible, whether in a Bible part God-made and part man-made, with no one to say where God begins and errant man ends, or in a Bible sent from God, immediately inspired by God, inerrant in every part from beginning to end?

How must the claims and assumptions of certain modern scholars in dealing with the inspired word of God appear to Him, "who doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth?"

## II.

DOES THE ORDINATION VOW EMBRACE, AS A PART OF ITS TERMS, A BELIEF IN THE INERRANCY OF THE WORD OF GOD AS IT WAS GIVEN BY HIM TO MEN?

The vow declares "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice."

How shall this vow be construed, and what is involved in its terms?

### *Rules for the Construction of the Vow.*

*a.* The party taking it should, as to its performance by himself, construe it in every case of reasonable doubt, against himself and in favor of the Church. He should give a generous performance of its terms, so as to carry out the purpose of the obligation—the peace, purity, and faith of the Church, the promotion of confidence, of certainty and faith in the Bible as God-given and God-inspired.

*b.* Its terms are to be taken in their plain, ordinary, common-sense meaning; not in a forced, technical, unusual sense.

*c.* Its terms are to be interpreted in the light of what is called the historic faith of the Church; the well-known construction, as evidenced by precedent and otherwise, prevailing at the time the vow was enacted and taken.

Such being some of the rules of construction, let us now consider what is involved in the terms of the vow.

*The Terms of the Vow.*

(1). It involves a belief by the subscriber, at the time of subscription and as long as he remains obligated by it, in a book or unit—a definite, fixed, unalterable quantity existing as “the Word of God,” and present in his mind at the time of subscription as distinguished from the work or word of man. The subscriber must have had present in his mind at the time of subscription a Word of God—not a word of God and man—as a definite, existing quantity, whose terms he understood and to which he gave intelligent assent as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

(2). It involves a belief that this Word of God was given wholly by God and immediately inspired by Him.

(3). It involves a belief in that Word of God as being “the only infallible rule of faith and practice.” That is, the book to which subscription is made is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

(4). It involves a belief in this fixed, existing quantity immediately inspired by God as inerrant, not capable of error—as God is not.

(5). It involves a belief that this Word, as it came from God was inerrant and that it remains inerrant for all time.

If these propositions are correct, the first thing that strikes us as strange in this present controversy is the attempted distinction between the book as it “*was*” and “*as it now is*.” How can there be a difference, and if there is, what is it?

The subscription to the vow does not call for a belief in any particular publisher’s edition or style of what is called the Bible. The belief is in the Word of God—not in the work or word of man—and this excludes the belief that there is in the book any thing of man’s as distinguished from God’s. So far as God used any agency for the communication of His will, and in so far as it was essential to make it His will—to that extent, as thus used, it was and is His work and Word. It is what came from God; what He said was His Word; what He gave us as His will, that constitutes that Word.

All that God deemed necessary to make that Word the completed fixed quantity, definite in its terms, and intelligible to men as the only infallible rule of

faith and practice, however minor or unimportant it may appear to our finite minds, is a part of the Word, and is of and from God, no matter what God used as an agency to that end.

It must have been a fixed quantity, a thing possessing the essential qualities of being immediately inspired by God, His revelation; what He designed we should receive as His Word. Being an errorless God, what He gave us must have had, as an essential quality, inerrancy. Have we that Word now? If we have, it is errorless. No errors can be in that of which He is the author.

Does that Word now exist? We, who have taken the ordination vow, and have affirmed before God and men, that it does exist, and exists as a fixed quantity, definite and specific in its terms, God-inspired, inerrant as a unit, are conclusively estopped from ever raising the question of the existence of such a Word of God, or the fact of its inspiration, its inerrancy as a unit. We had the privilege of doing this before we took the vow; but, having vowed, does not true liberty, implicit obedience to law and fidelity to obligation limit our inquiry solely to what God has said in his Word?

It is said there are discrepancies in the text as we now have it. What if there are? Are these discrepancies errors or untruths, and if errors or untruths, are they God's work? If they are, how can it be the Word of God? How can an inerrant God produce as His work an errant revelation?

Would it be within reason to charge that discrepancies in the copy of a law, such as the work of the scribe, or the printer, are errors, falsehoods in the law as enacted by the legislature? These discrepancies differ entirely, however, from false statements of fact, errors in statement, falsehoods in the law itself, placed there by the legislature, inconsistent with its purpose, and alike destructive of the character of its author and the validity of the law.

Does not this vow preclude the possibility of error in the Word of God? Does it not limit the subscriber to an acceptance of the book as immediately inspired by God, and is not his inquiry limited to what God has said therein?

As the Rev. Dr. Thomas Chalmers says in his sermon on the "Supreme Authority of Revelation:"

"Now this might be all very fair, were there no Bible and no revelation in existence. But it is not fair, that all this looseness, and all this variety, should be still floating in the world, in the face of an authoritative communication from God himself. Had no message come to us from the Fountain-

head of truth, it were natural enough for every individual mind to betake itself to its own speculation. But a message has come to us, bearing on its forehead every character of authenticity; and is it right now, that the question of our faith, or of our duty, should be committed to the capricious variations of this man's taste, or of that man's fancy? God has put an authoritative stop to all this. He has spoken, and the right or the liberty of speculation no longer remains to us. The question now is, not "What thinkest thou?" In the days of Pagan antiquity, no other question could be put; and to the wretched delusions and idolatries of that period, let us see what kind of answer the human mind is capable of making, when left to its own guidance, and its own authority. But we call ourselves Christians, and profess to receive the Bible as the directory of our faith; and the only question in which we are concerned, is, "What is written in the law? How readeest thou?"

"In order to know the mind of the Spirit, the communications of the Spirit, and the expression of these communications in written language, should be consulted. These are the only data upon which the inquiry should be instituted. . . . Let the principle of "What thinkest thou" be exploded, and that of "What readeest thou" be substituted in its place. Let us take our lesson as the Almighty places it before us, and, instead of being the judge of his conduct, be satisfied with the safer and humbler office of being the interpreter of his language.

"We must bring a free and unoccupied mind to the exercise. It must not be the pride or the obstinacy of self-formed opinions, or the haughty independence of him who thinks he has reached the manhood of his understanding. We must bring with us the docility of a child, if we want to gain the kingdom of heaven. It must not be a partial, but an entire and unexcepted obedience. There must be no garbling of that which is entire, no darkening of that which is luminous, no softening down of that which is authoritative or severe. The Bible will allow of no compromise. It professes to be the directory of our faith, and claims a total ascendancy over the souls and the understandings of men. It will enter into no composition with us, or our natural principles. It challenges the whole mind as its due, and it appeals to the truth of heaven for the high authority of its sanctions. 'Whosoever addeth to, or taketh from, the words of this book, is accursed,' is the absolute language in which it delivers itself. This brings us to its terms. There is no way of escaping after this. We must bring every thought into the captivity of its obedience, and as closely as ever lawyer stuck to his document or his extract, must we abide by the rule and the doctrine which this authentic memorial of God sets before us.

"Our business is not to guess, but to learn. After we have established Christianity to be an authentic message from God upon those historical grounds

on which the reason and the experience of man entitle him to form his conclusions, nothing remains for us but an unconditional surrender of the mind to the subject of the message.

“Every natural or assumed principle, which offers to abridge its supremacy, or even so much as to share with it in authority and direction, should be instantly discarded. Every opinion in religion should be reduced to the question of, What readest thou? and the Bible be acquiesced in, and submitted to, as the alone directory of our faith, where we can get the whole will of God for the salvation of man.”

“In the popular religions of antiquity, we see scarcely the vestige of a resemblance to that academical theism which is delivered in our schools, and figures away in the speculations of our moralists. The process of conversion among the first Christians was a very simple one. It consisted of an utter abandonment of their heathenism, and an entire submission to those new truths which came to them through the revelation of the Gospel, and through it only. It was the pure theology of Christ and of his apostles. That theology which struts in fancy demonstration from a professor's chair formed no part of it. They listened as if they had all to learn; we listen as if it was our office to judge, and to give the message of God its due place and subordination among the principles which we had previously established. Now, these principles were utterly unknown at the first publication of Christianity. The Galatians, and Corinthians, and Thessalonians, and Philippians had no conception of them. And yet, will any man say, that either Paul himself, or those who lived under his immediate tuition, had not enough to make them accomplished Christians, or that they fell short of our enlightened selves, in the wisdom which prepares for eternity, because they wanted our rational theology as a stepping stone to that knowledge which came, in pure and immediate revelation, from the Son of God? The Gospel was enough for them, and it should be enough for us also.

“But is not this an enlightened age, and since the days of the Gospel has not the wisdom of two thousand years accumulated upon the present generation? Has not science been enriched by discovery, and is not theology one of the sciences? Are the men of this advanced period to be restrained from the high exercise of their powers? And because the men of a remote and barbarous antiquity lisped and droveled in the infancy of their acquirements, is that any reason why we should be restricted like so many school-boys, to the lesson that is set before us? It is all true that this is a very enlightened age; but on what field has it acquired so flattering a distinction? On the field of experiment. The human mind owes all its progress to the confinement of its efforts within the safe and certain limits of observation, and to the severe restraint which it has imposed upon its speculative tendency. Go beyond these limits and the human mind has not advanced a single inch by its own independent

exercises. All the philosophy which has been reared by the labor of successive ages, is the philosophy of facts reduced to general laws, or brought under a general description from observed points of resemblance. A proud and wonderful fabric we do allow; but we throw away the very instrument by which it was built the moment that we cease to observe and begin to theorize and excogitate. Tell us a single discovery which has thrown a particle of light on the details of the divine administration. Tell us a single truth in the whole field of experimental science, which can bring us to the moral government of the Almighty by any other road than his own revelation."

We commend to every reader of this pamphlet a reading of the entire sermon from which we have quoted so liberally. These are the words, the faith, of one of the most gifted intellectually and scientifically of the sons of the Presbyterian Church; the giant of his time; one of the noblest, bravest, and most effective champions for liberty we have had in this century. A certain school of critics would sneer at Dr. Chalmers as narrow, bigoted, behind the age. May we be delivered from the unconscious self-righteousness and intellectual littleness of such a sneer.

This is the jubilee year of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1893. Fifty years ago—May, 1843—there filed out of St. Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, that memorable procession of four hundred ministers, headed by the Rev. Dr. Welsh (the Moderator of the General Assembly) and the Rev. Dr. Chalmers. The world has seen but few grander testimonies and sacrifices to liberty and fidelity to conviction, conscience, and the Word of God. There were Presbyterian giants in those days—Chalmers, Cunningham, Candlish, Duff, Guthrie, et al.—men of giant faith, intellect, and scholarship, who stood as the rock for an inerrant God and His inerrant Word. What would they say if with us now, as to the modern attacks of know-nothing, destructive criticism on the inerrancy, the integrity of the Word of God, and that, too, under the name of liberty and as consistent with and a part of the ordination vow of our beloved Presbyterian Church?

*"The Effect of the Vow."*

Is not the subscriber to this vow, by its very terms, by every rule of common honesty, precluded from assailing any part of this book as errant, as other than the Word of God, immediately inspired by Him? If the examination and investigations of his scholarship, of higher criticism so-called, his every thought

and service, start from and rest on the foundation that this is in every part God's word, inerrant, immediately inspired by God, is not his business, study, thought and teaching limited to ascertaining what God has said therein? Is it not a violation of the terms of the vow to intimate or insinuate that in any part of this God-given and inspired Word, God is absent and errant man is present. Is not every thing on his part that directly tends to disturb faith in this as the inerrant Word of God, equally against the vow? How can he question its statements? Must they not be accepted by him as from God, without question or controversy? Let there be no misunderstanding here. How can there be any room, under the terms of this vow, for questioning as from God any part of the fixed quantity subscribed to as the Word of God, as being in any sense the separate work of errant man? If this question is to be raised and this assault made on the integrity of the Word of God, must it not be done by those outside of the Church—by those who have not taken this ordination vow?

*Drs. Hamlin and Van Dyke.*

Here let us consider the extraordinary character of the declarations of Drs. Hamlin and Vandyke in the light of this vow, as to this so-called inerrancy theory being wholly in the air, and as to which they can neither affirm nor deny inerrancy without the original manuscripts.

When they subscribed to the ordination vow and affirmed the Scriptures to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, permit us to ask what book was in their minds to which they thus subscribed; what was the definite, fixed Word of God to which they assented and in which they believed? Was it errant, or inerrant, or a mixture? If a mixture of errancy and inerrancy, what part was inerrant and what part was errant? If all inerrant, then why these declarations against inerrancy now? If errant, how could it be the Word of God, so as to warrant their subscription to it as such? Leaving theories, which they say they have no use for, and coming to facts which they believe in, what kind of a Word of God, as a definite, fixed and certain quantity, was present in their minds when, in the presence of God, they solemnly affirmed it to be His Word? Was it errant? Then it has always been so. If errant in whole or in part, how could it be the Word of God—the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

These gentlemen can not claim, when they subscribed to this vow, that the whole subject of it was in the air, indefinite and chaotic, and that there was

not present in their minds a definite, fixed book or quantity of any kind, certain in its terms and intelligible to their faith. They must have had in their minds as the object of their faith an existing, definite book or compilation whose terms, statements and contents they knew and to which they subscribed as the Word of God. Did they believe that book to be inerrant, God-inspired, in all its parts, terms, and statements, and therefore the Word of God; or did they believe that some of its parts were errant and some inerrant, with no definite idea as to which was which? If so, how could they affirm it as a whole, as a unit, to be the Word of God? How could they believe, we repeat, a book errant in parts to be as a whole the Word of an inerrant God? If they believed it to be inerrant in all its parts and that it is the Word of God, and is the only Word God has given to the race, why can they not affirm it was and is and always has been the inerrant Word of God? How can it be inerrant now and yet have been errant at some other time, when it is the only revelation given by God, fixed in its terms and definite in its contents?

Unless the Word of God, the work of an inerrant God, can in any part be errant and still be the Word of God, which we claim is an utter impossibility, must it not have been, when received, and must it not ever continue to be, inerrant?

Is there room for any other construction of the ordination vow than that its terms embrace a belief in the Word of God as inerrant—inerrant when God gave it—inerrant now—and inerrant it must ever remain, and that this excludes even the negative, can't-affirm-or-can't-deny attitude as to the inerrancy of what are called the original manuscripts, and excludes the belief that the Word of God is now or ever has been errant in any of its parts?

### III.

ARE THE TERMS OF THE VOW BROAD ENOUGH TO EMBRACE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE SO-CALLED MANUSCRIPTS WERE INERRANT, AND THOSE WHO BELIEVE THEY WERE ERRANT, AND THOSE WHO CAN NEITHER AFFIRM NOR DENY EITHER THEIR INERRANCY OR ERRANCY?

If the foregoing position is correct, that the subscriber to the ordination vow that the Scriptures are the Word of God must have had in his mind, and must in so subscribing have affirmed that this Word of God, a fixed quantity, definite in its terms, and existing as a book or unit—is the Word of God, immediately



inspired by Him, it must be, and must have been so, when given, and like all God has given, inerrant, unchangeable, perfect and complete; then must not the terms of the vow necessarily exclude the negative, know-nothing, can't-prove attitude as well as they certainly exclude a belief in errors in the original manuscripts, or in the Word of God?

Shall the writer be compelled to regard as in good standing as a Presbyterian elder one who denies we have a Word of God, denies its inspiration or inerrancy? If not, how does this differ from being compelled to treat as a loyal Presbyterian elder one who, having subscribed to this vow, affirms there were errors in the original, errors in the Bible as it now is; that the original was not inerrant, neither is the Bible as it is, inerrant—that it is only true in parts and is false in parts, without any revelation of such a classification?

The inerrancy, God-inspiration, and infallibility of the Word of God in all its parts and as a unit, as a whole, is the foundation of our faith—is the only rock of certainty on which we can rest. To assail, doubt, or deny that inerrancy—that God-inspiration—is to strike a blow at the rock on which our faith rests; and that blow is struck, too, by those who claim to belong to our household of faith, are in good and regular standing therein, and have obtained that standing and position for assault by a subscription or affirmation to a solemn vow that the Scriptures thus assailed are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Is it unjust, unfair to say, that those in our ranks who assail the integrity, the inspiration of God's Word in parts, by affirming it contains errors or falsehoods, would not be listened to by one of the thousands that now read what they say, but for the position they are given by the church whose faith they are now engaged in destroying?

### *The New Faith. The New Vow.*

Are we not warranted in charging the attempt to so enlarge the ordination vow to be the creation of a new faith, a radical departure from her historic faith, a new creed and a new standard for the Presbyterian Church? To enlarge the terms of the vow in the name of liberty so as to permit men to be ministers, elders or deacons in the Presbyterian Church who deny the inerrancy of the Word of God in all its parts, who affirm it to be errant, false in parts and inerrant in parts, is to create a faith which the Presbyterian Church never has believed in, and is to throw a burden on and

make it repugnant to the consciences of those who subscribed to it as interpreted by the historic faith of the Church and by the plain, natural, common-sense meaning of its terms. Are not these the men that are imposing a new test of orthodoxy and insisting on a fellowship which the conscience should not be asked to tolerate, and this in the name of liberty? The vow that tolerates differences in non-essentials and accords liberty therein, as rigidly excludes differences on essentials—on the fundamental doctrines of our Presbyterian faith, and this is the only liberty worthy of the name.

If this be true, how can the can't-affirm, the can't-prove-or-can't-deny attitude, as well as the belief in errors, falsehoods, in the original, be embraced in the terms of the vow? Is not any attempt, even in the name of liberty, or for peace, to enlarge the terms of the vow to include them, the making of a new faith; an enlargement of the terms and scope of the vow compelling those who have subscribed to it to accept as their faith something they never agreed to do? How can two walk together unless they be agreed? Why should they be compelled to fellowship if in disagreement on essential articles of faith? To compel a man who believes in the inerrant Word, that is now and ever has been inerrant, who believes that without that inerrancy in all its parts as it came from God and now is, it can not be the Word of God, to fellowship with one who believes the Bible is now or ever has been errant in some of its parts, is to make a man violate conscience, surrender principle and make shipwreck of faith. To force this on him in the name of liberty is intolerance and oppression.

*“What the Vow Does Not Cover.”*

How can the ordination vow embrace in its terms, even under the name of liberty and toleration of differences, direct contradictions of essentials, of fundamental articles of faith? How can it permit a belief in an errant God, and also in an inerrant God? How can it permit a belief in the Word of God as a unit, true in some statements, and false in others? How can it permit a belief in Christ as God and man in the absence of the original, and also a belief in Christ as a mere man? How can it permit a belief that neither affirms nor denies, because of the absence of the original Christ, that he was God, possessed the qualities of God, and also a belief that he was not God?

The enlargement of the ordination vow in the name of liberty to permit such contradictions is intolerance, is a violation of the terms of the vow, and

is the creation of a new test or standard of orthodoxy which the conscience rejects, common honesty repudiates, and which is a libel on liberty.

Is not this modern school of can't-tells, of know-nothings, can't-prove, can't-affirm-or-deny that the Word of an inerrant God, as it came from Him, and now is, must have been, and must be inerrant, attempting to create a new ordination vow, and a new faith for the Presbyterian Church, under whose enlarged terms, in the name of liberty, Martineau and Newman are as good Presbyterians as Thomas Chalmers and Archibald Alexander? The reason, the conscience, of every subscriber to the ordination vow of the Presbyterian Church as it now stands, has a right to revolt against such a construction of its terms, and the creation of such a standard of orthodoxy, and this in the exercise of the largest liberty and legitimate toleration of differences.

We have had no new revelation from God. It is the same old Bible. Modern scholarship can neither add to nor take from what God has said. Its mission is limited to ascertaining what God has said under the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit.

Loyalty to our ordination vows and fidelity to our obligations ought not to be affected by the modern clamor for a larger liberty, nor the needless fear of strife, dissensions and secession in this crisis forced on our beloved Presbyterian Church, nor the discussion and feeling incident to it. Let us remember :

*a.* That no men, or class of men, in our Church, have a monopoly of the spirit of patience, fairness, peace and a desire for the winning of souls.

The unconscious self-righteousness, which seems to have prompted and which characterizes some recent sermons and appeals, is appalling. Who authorizes anyone to assume that those who differ from him are any less earnest in soul-winning than he is; any less fair or patient in discussion, or any less desirous for peace and work consistent with the maintenance of the historic faith of our Church?

*b.* The constitution of our beloved Church, by which we are all bound, and which we ought to be zealous in maintaining, has provided competent tribunals to determine all questions of faith, and to those tribunals must be left the decision of the pending cases—whether the issues involved and the teaching of those charged with violation of their ordination vows are important and essential or otherwise. As the Supreme Court of the United States has well said :

“It is of the essence of these religious unions and of their right to establish tribunals for the decision of questions arising among themselves, that those decisions should be binding in all cases of ecclesiastical cognizance, subject only to such appeals as the organism itself provides for.”

c. May we be saved from the insanity of folly of denouncing our General Assembly, the supreme judicial court of our Church, as a “mob,” “swayed by impulse”—as “any thing but a deliberative body”—when its decisions do not conform to our preconceived opinions or wishes. May we be saved from the like folly of eulogizing it as a solemn and deliberative body, actuated by wisdom and justice, “*only*” when its decisions do conform to our views and wishes. Let us imitate the Supreme Court of the United States in its appreciation of the importance of that tribunal and the fitness of its members for the decision of the important questions committed to its care. We quote the language of that court in the Walnut Street Presbyterian Church case, *Watson v. Jones*, 13 Wallace, 610:

“Nor do we see that justice would be likely to be promoted by submitting those decisions to review in the ordinary judicial tribunals. Each of those large and influential bodies (to mention no others, let reference be had to the Protestant Episcopal, the Methodist Episcopal and the Presbyterian churches), has a body of constitutional and ecclesiastical law of its own, to be found in their written organic laws, their books of discipline, in their collections of precedents, in their usage and customs, which as to each constitute a system of ecclesiastical law and religious faith that tasks the ablest minds to become familiar with. ‘It is not to be supposed that the judges of the civil courts can be as competent in the ecclesiastical law and religious faith of all these bodies as the ablest men in each are in reference to their own. It would, therefore, be an appeal from the more learned tribunal in the law which should decide the case, to one which is less so.’”

d. Let us bear in mind that God reigns, that our beloved Church with its historic faith, is his special care, and that no man or body of men in our Church are essential to her permanent welfare or to the wise solution of all that God has committed to her keeping.

# THE INERRANT WORD.

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Inspired of God, inerrant Word,  
 The Father's will revealed.  
 Eternal truth, Almighty Lord,  
 Unerring wisdom sealed.  
 In all its parts, in every line,  
 As from His hand it came,  
 Inerrant is the book divine,  
 Unchangeably the same.

Infinite love gave us the Word,  
 Inerrant skill each page,  
 God's gift to man with treasures stored  
 For every need and age.  
 No skill of self-sufficient man  
 Can change its verity;  
 No sneer nor hate of sceptic can  
 Destroy its purity.

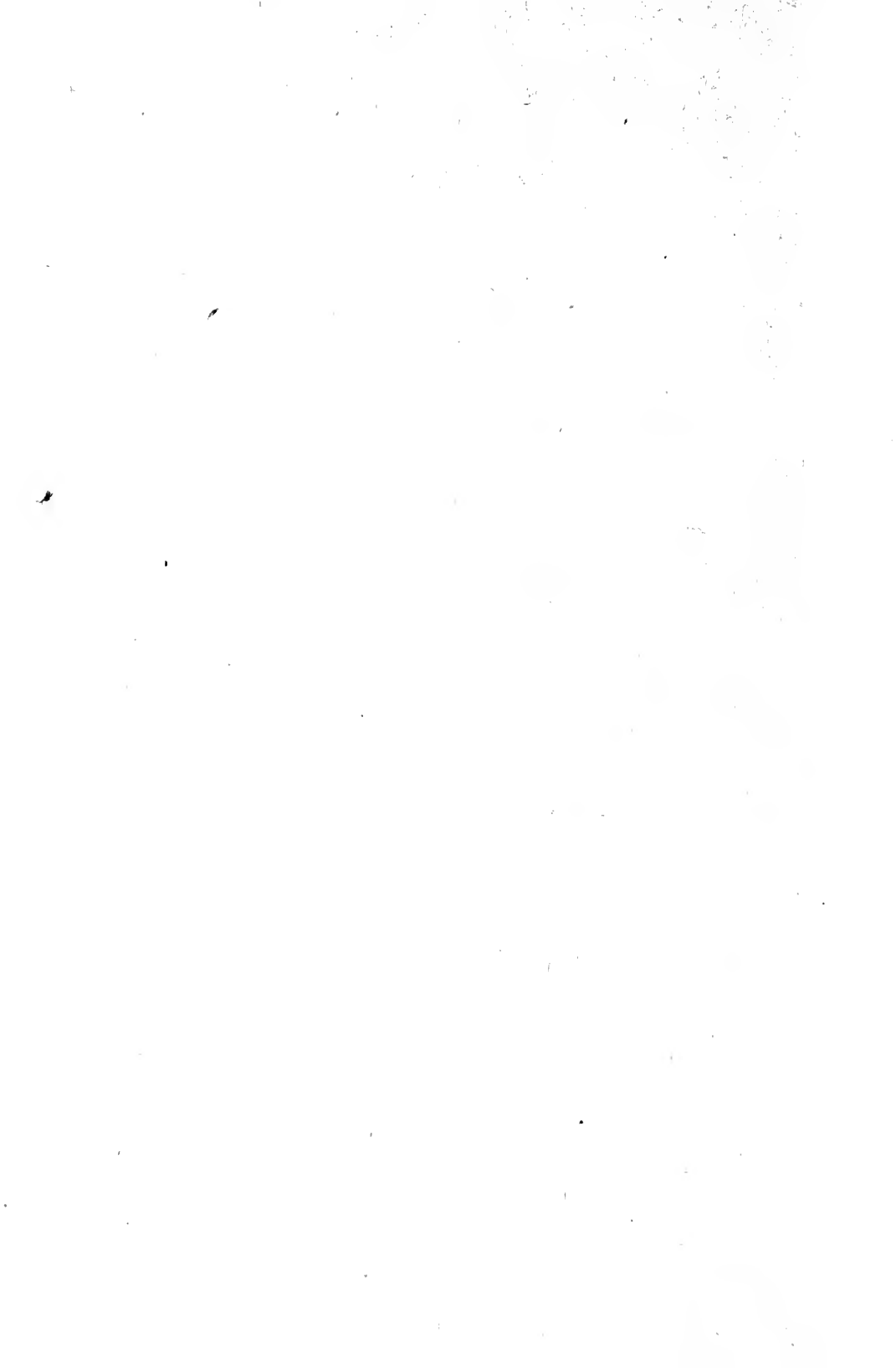
Inerrant God, no word of Thine  
 Is work of errant hand;  
 Help finite minds, Spirit divine,  
 Thy Word to understand.  
 "Thus saith the Lord," and erring man  
 Hears only to obey;  
 God's gracious will and holy plan,  
 Man's only rock and stay.

Thy Church, O God, will stand secure  
 On Thine inerrant Word,  
 And in the conflict still endure  
 And triumph in her Lord.  
 People of God, here rest your faith:  
 Eternal truth will live;  
 To those who trust Him, as He saith,  
 Eternal life He'll give.



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